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DEPT FOR AF A A/S CARTER, AF/SPG, AF/E, AF/C
NSC FOR MGAVIN AND CHUDSON
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DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

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SUBJECT: DARFUR UPDATE: REPORTS OF SAF BOMBING, GROUND ATTACKS IN
EAST JEBEL MARRA; MORE VIOLENCE FEARED IN WADAA

REF A) KHARTOUM 194

11. (SBU) Summary: The SAF has been bombing the SLA/Abdul Wahid-held area of Kutur in East Jebel Marra beginning at 07:00 on February 18, an SLA/AW commander told poloff. He stated that the bombing has resulted in six civilian deaths and the destruction of many homes and livestock. GOS paramilitary forces have moved into the area from their positions in Al Malam and at 15:00 were clashing with SLA/AW forces in the village of Saby, he said. Sources at UNAMID told poloff they also had unconfirmed reports of bombing the morning on February 18 in Faluga, east of Deribat, resulting in several civilian deaths. Meanwhile in North Darfur, the recent clashes in Wadada between Mima tribesman indigenous to the area and the SLA/Minnawi forces trying to retake the town caused extensive damage that did not seem to have been caused by combat, but rather was deliberately inflicted, according to a UNAMID assessment team that visited Wadada on February 13. Neither a precise casualty toll nor the number of possible wounded could be obtained or verified. On February 17 a UNDSS officer told poloff on that SLA/MM forces, backed by SLA/Unity, are preparing to launch another attack on Wadada in the coming days. They have warned all Zaghawa and internationals to vacate the area, he said. End Summary.

REPORTS OF SAF BOMBING IN EAST JEBEL MARRA

12. On February 18, poloff received a call from SLA/AW Commander Ibrahim Al-Helou. Al-Helou stated that at approximately 07:00, the SAF began bombing heavily the area of Kutur (phonetic) in East Jebel Marra held by SLA/AW. The bombing continued up until 11:00 and resulted in the death of 3 women, 2 children and one elderly man, as well as the destruction of homes and livestock. At approximately 15:00, Al-Helou told poloff that GOS paramilitary forces moved into the area from their positions in Al Malam and were fighting with SLA/AW forces in the village of Saby, approximately 30 kilometers northwest of Shangil Tobay. (Note: Al Malam was the site of clashes between JEM and GOS forces on February 11-12. Both JEM and the SAF made competing claims of victory following the clashes, but none of these was verified by independent sources. Jebel-Marra based SLA/Abdul Wahid commander Abdulgadir Abdurrahman Ibrahim (known as Gadura) told emboff on February 16 that while fighting did take place between JEM and the SAF, it was not significant and both sides overstated their claims to victory. End Note.) On February 18, a UNAMID official also told poloff there were unconfirmed reports of bombings that morning 1.5 kilometers outside of Faluga, east of Deribat. Four civilians were reportedly killed, including three children, and five injured.

UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN WADAA

13. (SBU) On February 13, UNAMID sent a fact-finding and assessment

team lead by Force Commander Agwai to Wadaa following several days of clashes involving SLA/Minni Minnawi, backed by SLA/Unity, and members of the Mima tribe who are the original inhabitants of the area (reftel). The team reported that it witnessed extensive damage to the town, which seemed deliberately inflicted. Numerous buildings and equipment--houses, shops, huts, generators--were burnt to the ground as was the market place, which was allegedly looted. Granaries set on fire were still smoldering during the time of the visit. According to the local population, medical supplies at a local dispensary, water pump equipment, goods and food, were allegedly stolen, as well as more than 2000 cattle herded out of the area.

¶4. (SBU) At two different locations nearby, the UNAMID team was shown fresh mounds of earth that, according to the locals, were the recently-dug mass graves where they buried 45 of their own people. The same sources indicated that a large number of people, many reported as having fled the fighting, were still unaccounted for. Neither a precise casualty toll nor the number of possible wounded could be obtained and verified. (Note: Adam Ahmed, TDRA Land Commissioner and a Mima SLM/MM member who hails from Wadaa, told poloff on February 17 that local leaders claim that 31 people died as a result of last week's clashes, with an unknown number of villagers still missing and unaccounted for. Ahmed reported that non-Zaghawa within SLM/MM are extremely unhappy about the attacks, accusing Minnawi's movement of refusing to permit humanitarian organizations to access the area. End Note.)

¶5. (SBU) UNDSS sources reported that the devastation was caused during clashes between the Mima tribesmen indigenous to the area and forces of SLA/Minni Minnawi, backed by SLA/Unity. (Note: SLA/MM has generally controlled the area since 2004, but is not welcomed by the

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Mima due to harassment, mistreatment and taxation. Fighting also erupted in 2007 between Mima backed by the GoS and Zaghawa supported by SLA/MM. End Note.) The local leader of Wadaa told UNDSS that on February 9, an attempt by the Mima to push SLA/MM out of the area resulted in the killing of a SLA/MM commander. The following day, SLA/MM forces with about 17 vehicles backed by SLA Unity attacked the village. The entire market was destroyed, as was 40% of the town, according to UNDSS. The SLA/MM forces were said have withdrawn from the area that evening.

¶6. (SBU) On February 11, SAF forces with about 40 vehicles ambushed a convoy of SLA Unity fighters at a location 18 kilometers west of Wadaa, but Unity managed to repel the attack, according to UNDSS. (Note: on February 11, SLA/Unity's London-based spokesman Mahjoub Hussein issued a statement announcing that SLM/Unity had launched military attack on Wadaa, and requested UNAMID withdraw from the area. The statement affirmed that SLA/Unity had repelled a SAF ambush near Wadaa, and also strongly condemned the GOS-JEM talks in Doha, reiterating SLA/Unity's refusal to participate in these talks. End Note.)

MORE ATTACKS FEARED?

¶7. (SBU) On February 17, a UNDSS officer told poloff that SLA/MM was preparing to launch another attack to retake the town of Wadaa in the coming days. "It's the same old story of a land grab," he said. SLA/MM commanders have warned all Zaghawa and internationals to vacate the area, he said. SAF forces are currently present around the town, but they claim they are only making security arrangements, and "they've made it clear they won't stay and fight." Chairman of the Darfur Land Commission Adam also told poloff that local leaders have communicated to him that Zaghawa living nearby have departed since the clashes, a sign that Ahmed said may indicate a coming counterattack by the Zaghawa-aligned forces of SLA/MM and SLA/Unity.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: SLA/Abdul Wahid's positions in Darfur are largely defensive and pose little threat to the SAF, which is why reports of bombing of his areas of control are puzzling. It is possible the alleged bombings were carried out in reaction to Abdul Wahid's Israel trip and his public statements characterizing the Doha talks

as reconciliation between Sudan's Islamists. However, regardless of the GOS's motivation, its alleged bombings do little to ease doubts about GOS sincerity in finding a solution to the conflict. Meanwhile, the situation in Wadai shows that despite Minnawi's loss of territory and influence over the past month, his commanders are still capable of destabilizing the security situation in Darfur. This is also true of SLA/Unity, which continues to move with impunity from the foothills of Jebel Marra all along the border between North and South Darfur. Without the participation of either group, any potential ceasefire arrangement reached between the GOS and JEM in Doha will do little to bring peace to Darfur. The participation of SLA/Abdul Wahid in some fashion is also crucial, because although his forces maintain a largely defensive posture, he remains the only rebel leader with significant popular support and legitimacy.

FERNANDEZ